

My name is Thomas Smith. I am a 30-year resident of the city. I have been politically active and also I am very involved with numerous charitable organizations in the city. I have been elected as a delegate to the Ward Three Democratic Committee for 22 years. I have contributed to the campaigns of most members of the Council – past and present – and have voted for many of you – Democrats, Republicans, and Independents alike -- now sitting on the Council today. I am also heavily involved in my religious community serving in various volunteer capacities at the Washington Hebrew Congregation.

I am also a very proud season ticket holder of the Washington Nationals. I am one of many District residents who supports the return of Major League Baseball to the city and to the stadium proposal approved last year by the narrowest of votes by this body.

As a District taxpayer, the issue for me is a very simple one. I care about schools. I care about libraries. I care about the homeless. I care about many social issues. And the time I volunteer and the contributions I give reflect that concern. This city has many challenges and must do better to respond to the social needs of all its citizens. Given the limited tax base, it is unrealistic to rely solely on District residents to pay the taxes needed to fund needed social programs. The stadium project has the potential to grow our local economy as a way to generate added revenue –even from those outside the city – to meet the city's needs.

We need to do more to promote development in areas – other than the existing central business district and Ward 3 – to grow the economy of our city.

Although you have an important oversight role to ensure accountability for the stadium project, I wish you were asking the mayor's representatives more questions about long-term projections for the new revenue that this project is likely to bring to the city instead of playing paper games about whether infrastructure improvements should be included in the overall stadium cost estimates.

Last year at this time, I felt I spent more time in these Council chambers than I did in my office or my home. I am here today despite swearing never to subject myself to those antics ever again. As a voter in this city, the continuing diatribe by some on this Council has grown more than stale. I am tired of the demagogic appeals to some of our residents by the constant references to the billionaire baseball owners. I am tired of the rhetoric – more campaign style than substance – that misleads people into thinking the choice is between a stadium and schools or a stadium and libraries. You know the fees collected from the business community to be spent on the stadium would not be approved by this council for the schools, to build libraries, or house the homeless.

Grassroots supporters of baseball in this city are not conducting city-wide political-style campaigns with signs, mailers, and phone calls. I wish those people engaging in the political style campaigns to fight the stadium proposal would commit those resources to meet the charitable needs of this community rather than trying to fight an economic development project that offers so much promise for the city.

Rather than posing for the news cameras, fiddling around with the best sound bite, or assessing what language will make a good campaign slogan, it is time for the Council to assume some real leadership. You were not elected to be prosecutors or pit bulls. You were elected to improve the city and solve our problems. That is what leadership is all about.

I am here today out of a sense of frustration with a very simple message. Quit misleading the public. Quit the posturing for the cameras. Quit demonizing baseball supporters. Quit fighting over baseball. Get on with it. This project is good for the city. Please start focusing on the real problems affecting our community.